

Robert G. Balfour

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Deuteronomy

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# DEUTERONOMY:

THE WORDS OF MOSES

ON THE

PLAINS OF MOAB.

BY

ROBERT G. BALFOUR,

MINISTER OF FREE NORTH CHURCH, EDINBURGH.

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

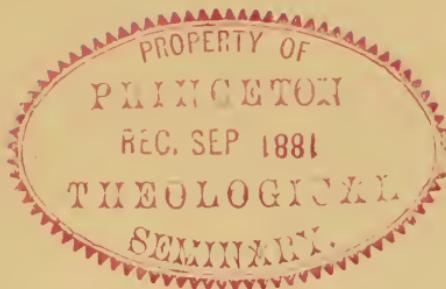
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THIS lecture was delivered as one of a course upon the Life and Character of Moses, and was prepared with a view to no wider audience than the Free New North congregation. The first few paragraphs will explain the way in which the Deuteronomy question, now so much agitated, was forced upon me, so that I could not with propriety evade it. The lecture was not intended to be a learned or exhaustive discussion of the subject, but only such a view of it as could be presented in brief compass, to a people of Christian intelligence without theological training. It is now published at the request of the members of Kirk Session who heard it, and who expressed a wish that they and others might have the opportunity of reading it at home. I therefore send it

forth with scarcely any alteration, and with the prayer that God may use this humble instrumentality for the vindication of the historic truth of a portion of His word, and for the establishment of some whose faith in it has been shaken.

R. G. B.

EDINBURGH, *January* 28, 1881.



THE life of Moses was now drawing to a close ; his work was almost ended. For he had been distinctly warned that he was not to lead his people into the land of promise, and they were now upon its very borders. Nay, one might say that in their victories over Og and Sihon the wars of Canaan were already begun, for they had in them an earnest of the success that would attend their arms when they had crossed the Jordan. And in the territory thus acquired for Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, they had a substantial instalment of the inheritance to be ultimately given to all the tribes of Israel. There was, indeed, one other enemy whom they had to contend with, Balak the king of Moab, an enemy all the more dangerous on account of the peculiar way in which his hostility was shown. But I defer the consideration of that subject, with the view of taking up in a separate lecture the character of Balaam, a man who occupies in the word of God a niche peculiarly his own.

Passing over this episode in Israel's history for the present, the only thing that remains to be noticed before the death of Moses on Pisgah is the solemn and affecting charge which he addressed to the people on the plains of Moab, and which we have somewhat fully reported in the book of Deuteronomy. Had I come to this point a few years ago, I would have proceeded at once to take a rapid survey of that long and beautiful discourse, as throwing light upon the character of the aged law-giver and his fatherly affection for his people. But, as you know well, doubts have recently been thrown upon the question, whether the words recorded in Deuteronomy were ever spoken by Moses at all. The historical character of the book, or at least of large portions of it, has been denied. It has been confidently asserted that it bears intrinsic evidence of a later date, and that it contains legislation which conflicts with that of the three previous books—legislation which did not come into force till the time of King Josiah, so that we must conclude that it was written shortly before that time by some unknown prophet, and thrown parabolically into the form of an address delivered by Moses several centuries before, simply to indicate that it was a legitimate development of the Mosaic law. This view having, from peculiar circumstances, been brought before the public in a way calculated to produce an impression in its favour,

I feel that it lies directly in my way, so that I cannot proceed on the assumption that Deuteronomy does contain the speeches and laws of Moses without giving, as briefly as I can, my reasons for this belief.

Before proceeding to consider the alleged evidence for the later origin of Deuteronomy, and the way in which it is to be met, let me mention two things which furnish at least a strong presumption in favour of the earlier date. First, it undoubtedly purports to be a report of the words of Moses. The first five verses of the book make that plain beyond all question, for not only is Moses declared to be the speaker, but the time when, and the place where the words were spoken are particularly described. Of course this does not imply that the last chapter, which contains an account of his death, was not added by another hand. Nor is it inconsistent with the supposition that some later inspired writer, such as Ezra, may have added certain marginal notes, or parenthetical explanations, which are now incorporated with the text. But it certainly amounts to a strong presumption that the book, for substance, consists of what was spoken by Moses on the plains of Moab. If any one says that a part of it, even though put apparently into the mouth of Moses, *was not*, and *could not have been* spoken by him, and had no existence till centuries after he was dead, he is saying a thing

which is *prima facie* very unlikely, and which he would need to prove by very strong arguments indeed.

And, secondly, this presumption, founded upon the statements of the book itself, is greatly strengthened by the fact, that, so far as we know, it has always been regarded, except by a few critics in modern times, as an authentic record of what Moses said and did. In particular it seems to have been so regarded by Christ and His apostles. Thus, when the Pharisees questioned our Lord on the subject of divorce, referring to a passage which we find in Deut. xxiv. 1, He answered : “ Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” The Apostle Peter, too, addressing the multitude after the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple, referring to Deut. xviii. 15, used these words : “ Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me.” Both our Lord, therefore, and His apostle, lend their sanction to the received opinion, that Deuteronomy, and even the central and disputed portion of it, is a record of the words of Moses. It may be said that we are not to press such incidental utterances as these—that the disciple and the Master simply quoted from a book which was commonly ascribed to Moses, and that they were not called in

the circumstances to raise the question whether the received opinion was right or wrong. Well, I admit that this view of the matter is just conceivable, and I would take refuge in it if I were driven by overwhelming evidence to the conclusion that these statements could not possibly have fallen from the lips of Moses. But certainly the presumption is very strong, that the book is what it professes to be, and what our Lord and His apostles quoted it as being, a record of the words of Moses.

In considering the arguments brought forward to prove that Deuteronomy belongs to a much later period than that of Moses, I must confine my attention to those which are confessedly the most important. There are some, such as the alleged difference of style in this and the previous books, and certain minute discrepancies between the laws as given there and repeated here, which I must pass over, because it would lead us into perplexing and tedious details. On these points I would only make two general remarks. (1.) Deuteronomy consists of a lengthened hortatory address, delivered by the aged Moses to the people whom he loved so well, at a time when he knew that his end was near. Hence the difference of style. Hence the fervour and fulness of his utterances here, as compared with the technical precision of the legal books. And even when the same legislation is repeated, as in the case of the cities of refuge, it was natural that he should

make use of different terms when setting forth the matter in a more free and popular way. (2.) A period of nearly forty years had elapsed since the giving of the law at Sinai, and they were now about to exchange their migratory life in the wilderness for a settled life in Caanan. It was natural therefore that, in re-issuing the law by divine authority, a few minor modifications should be introduced. We know that within the first forty years of the history of the Christian Church, certain very important modifications were made, such as the appointment of the order of deacons, and the release of the Gentile converts from the obligation to be circumcised.

But, passing by those points of confessedly secondary importance, the three great arguments brought forward to prove the comparatively late origin of Deuteronomy are these:—(1.) That, whereas in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers there is a broad distinction between the priests and Levites; in this book that distinction disappears, and every Levite is represented as a possible priest. Therefore the book describes a different state of matters, and belongs to a different age. (2.) In Deuteronomy we have precise regulations laid down in connection with the choice of a king who should go before them and fight their battles, which, it is held, could not have been written before the days of Samuel, otherwise the Lord would not have been displeased.

with Israel for asking that they should have a king. And (3.) In Deuteronomy the people are restricted to one altar, where all the sacrifices are to be offered up, which is quite contrary to the permission given them in Exodus xx. 24, to erect an altar wherever God might record His name, and which is a restriction that was never actually enforced until the days of the later kings.

Now, as to the first of these arguments, when carefully examined, it amounts to nothing more than this,—that in Deuteronomy the line of distinction between priests and Levites was not so sharply drawn as in the earlier books. The priests are designated from the tribe to which they belonged, “the priests, the Levites,” not from the family of which they were members, “the priests, the sons of Aaron.” Nor is it difficult to see a reason for this change of designation. In the first place, Aaron was now dead, so that it was natural to drop his name from the description of the priestly order. And, in the second place, the priesthood was by this time firmly established and universally recognised as belonging to the lineal descendants of Aaron. The formidable rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against the exclusive priesthood of his family had been so effectually and so awfully quelled by the overthrow of the rebels and the blossoming of Aaron’s rod, that every whisper of opposition had been silenced, and there was no call to be always

emphasising a distinction which no one doubted or denied. This, I think, is sufficient to account for the higher position apparently conceded to the Levites in Deuteronomy than in the preceding books.

Then, as to the second argument about the laws and regulations relating to the king, it is not to be denied that there is some difficulty here. I suppose we have all felt it. We have wondered why the Lord was so displeased with Israel for demanding a king, when in the book of Deuteronomy the prospect of their doing this some day is so clearly contemplated, and laws laid down as to the sort of king they were to choose, and certain things which he was to do and to refrain from doing. All that can be said is that there is enough in the narrative in Samuel to give probability to the supposition, that the offence on the part of Israel was not the mere demand for a king, but the motives that prompted it, the spirit and manner in which it was made. They did it in a way that showed that their real object was to get rid of that direct and immediate dependence on Jehovah as their king, which was their distinguishing glory as a nation. It was this that displeased the Lord, as he indicated when he said to Samuel, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

At any rate, if there be a difficulty in supposing that the law of the kingdom was framed in the

days of Moses, the difficulty is far greater if we assign it to the time of Hezekiah. For what does it enact? “Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose; one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother” (Deut. xvii. 15). Would such a law have been given at a time when no one had a chance of being set upon the throne, unless he could prove, not only that he was an Israelite, but that he was a lineal descendant of King David? An attempt has been made to evade the force of this argument by saying, that we learn from Isa. vii. 6, and viii. 9-12, that in the days of King Ahaz there was a conspiracy on the part of Ephraim and Assyria to displace him and set the son of Tabeal on the throne, and that some in Judah were privy to this plot, so that these words in the Deuteronomic law may have been framed with the express view of condemning that proposal. To this I answer, that the law in question has not in the least the aspect of having been framed in connection with such an insignificant and temporary plot, which, as Isaiah declared, was certain to come to nought. And most assuredly these conspirators—impious men, as the whole strain of the prophet’s reference to them proves them to have been—would not have been hindered from their purpose by the mere issuing of a law like this.

We are now brought to the third and most important argument advanced to prove the late origin of the book. In Deut. xii. we have a very precise injunction laid upon the Israelites,—to take effect as soon as they were peaceably settled in the land of their inheritance,—that they were not to offer burnt-offerings anywhere but in the place which the Lord should choose in one of their tribes. Now it is maintained that this is inconsistent with the legislation in Exod. xx. 24-26, where they were permitted to erect an altar in all places where God recorded His name, provided it were made of earth, or of unhewn stone. And further, it is maintained that this freedom to offer sacrifice in a great variety of places was evidently exercised long after their settlement in the land, as is proved by the practice of Samuel and David, and even of Elijah at a much later period. It is alleged that the restriction of their liberty, and the command to worship at a central sanctuary arose out of the abuse of the high places to purposes of idolatry in the days of the kings. Hence it is argued that this law at least must have been enacted centuries after the death of Moses, and put into his mouth in a figurative or parabolic sense, to indicate that it was a legitimate development of Mosaic legislation, though how it could be *that*, when it was flatly contrary to the law which Moses himself had given, it is hard to see. Plainly this argument, drawn

from the law of the central sanctuary, is the key of the position, for the date of its enactment is very precisely fixed by reference (1) to the past, during which a different practice had prevailed, ver. 8 ; (2) to the present, for they had not yet reached the land of promise, ver. 9 ; and (3) to the future, for the new law was to come into force when they were settled in peaceable possession of that land, ver. 10: If this legislation turns out after all to have originated in the days of Ahaz, there is no part of the book that can be proved to have been written at an earlier date.

Let us look, then, at this point a little more closely. It must, I think, be admitted that the instructions given in Exod. xx., immediately after the proclamation of the ten commandments from Sinai, do imply that the children of Israel were to offer burnt-offerings in various places, provided suitable altars were erected for the purpose. And this is evidently admitted, when the new law restricting them to one central sanctuary is given in Deuteronomy. For in connection with that enactment it is said, “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.” . . . “But when ye go over Jordan . . . then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there: thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt-offerings,” &c. So that

the difficulty is not as to the opposition between the law of Exodus and of Deuteronomy, for it is admitted in the latter that this is new legislation, by which their former liberty is curtailed. The only difficulty is this, that long after the days of Moses, the people seem to have gone on worshipping at local shrines, as well as at the central sanctuary, apparently without the slightest idea that they were disobeying the divine command.

Now it is not to be denied that we do find instances of altars being built and sacrifices offered up on them in other places than the one appointed centre, even after Israel were settled in the land of Caanan. Thus Gideon built an altar to the Lord at Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites ; Samuel offered a burnt-offering at Mizpeh ; Saul sacrificed at Gilgal ; David on the threshing-floor of Araunah ; and Elijah at Mount Carmel. And the question is, Are these incidents conclusive proof that the restrictive law of Deuteronomy had not yet been enacted ? I do not think they are, even if we had no positive evidence to produce to show that that law was then perfectly well known. For a law may be in existence, even though it may in many cases be disobeyed. A law may be on the statute book, and yet for a time, owing to a variety of circumstances, it may be practically in abeyance. And a law, bearing on the mere externals of worship, may, with the full sanction of the Divine

Lawgiver, be set aside when a literal adherence to it would be prejudicial to higher interests. This principle was enforced by our Lord Himself, when he said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath ;" and reminded the Pharisees that it was written, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Applying these very obvious considerations to the case before us, it is not difficult to see that the existence of a law restricting sacrifice to a central altar is compatible with the fact that in not a few instances that law was practically ignored. For in the first place the Israelites were not such models of obedience to the will of God that we can safely determine what His law was by simply looking at their practice. We know that they were a stiff-necked, rebellious people, prone to follow their own wayward impulses rather than the commands of God. And so the fact that they worshipped at various high places, instead of coming to the great altar of burnt-offering, first at Shiloh, and afterwards at Jerusalem, is no proof that the law requiring them to do this was not yet enacted. The case of Samuel and David is somewhat different. It must be remembered, however, that in their time there was no central sanctuary—no place which the Lord had chosen in which to put His name. The ark was in captivity among the Philistines, or moving from place to place. Shiloh, where God

set His name at the first, was destroyed for the wickedness of His people Israel (Jer. vii. 12). In this state of ecclesiastical disorganisation it was impossible to carry out the Deuteronomic law. From the force of circumstances it was in abeyance for a time, and if any worship was to be offered to God at all, it must be in accordance with the older law and promise of Exodus, which would then come again into practical operation: "In all places when I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee."

The case of Elijah was somewhat peculiar. I do not refer to his building an altar to the Lord in Carmel, for that he doubtless did as a prophet by the express command of God. But when the Lord appeared to him in Horeb we find him saying: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword." How could these be called God's altars if they were erected in disobedience to the law of the central sanctuary, and in rivalry to the altar of Jehovah at Jerusalem? How could it be wrong to throw them down, when it was the very thing which King Josiah was praised for doing? Does not this imply that the law forbidding these altars must have been given sometime between the days of Elijah and Josiah? No, it does not. It only shows that in the peculiar and

trying circumstances of the godly remnant of the ten tribes, who could not well go up to worship at Jerusalem after the complete rupture between them and the tribe of Judah, God was pleased to accept the sincere and devout, though not quite regular, worship of the local altars. This was eminently a case for the application of the principle, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” If the religion of the true God was to be kept up in Israel at all, in the face of the prevalent worship of Baal and of the calves, this departure from the letter of the law must be tolerated. Hence these altars were recognised as places where, in the circumstances, devout Israelites might acceptably worship God. It was one thing for Ahab to throw them down that he might compel the entire people to bow the knee to Baal, and a very different thing for Josiah to throw them down at a later period, when they had become instruments of idolatry, that all might go up to worship God at His temple in Jerusalem.

But while I do not think that any of these instances of worship offered at local shrines, or all of them put together, are any proof that the law of the central sanctuary was unknown till towards the close of the Hebrew monarchy, there is one passage that seems to me to prove conclusively that this law was known and reverenced by all Israel in the days of Joshua, immediately after they were settled in quiet possession of the land of Canaan. We are

told, in Joshua xxii., that, immediately after dividing the land among the tribes of Israel for their inheritance, Joshua called together the Reubenites, and Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and after acknowledging the loyal spirit in which they had stood by their brethren in the wars of Canaan, sent them away with his blessing to their own homes on the other side of Jordan. Soon after they left, tidings were brought to the other tribes that on their way to Gilead they had built a large altar in the valley of the Jordan. Now mark the effect which this information produced upon their minds. If there had been no such law as that which we find in Deut. xii., this must have seemed to them the most natural thing in the world, that their brethren, when going to reside at a distance from them, should build an altar on their own territory, at which they might conveniently worship. Instead of that they were filled with sorrow and indignation, and, preparing to make war with their brethren about it in case expostulation should prove unavailing, they sent ten of their chief men, along with Phinehas, the high priest's son, to remonstrate with them on the sin of which they were guilty. Hear the terms of their remonstrance: "Thus saith the whole congregation of the Lord, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that ye have builded

you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the Lord?" Then they go on to compare their sin with that of those who had worshipped Baal-Peor and brought the anger of the Lord upon Israel, or the sin of Achan, who had trespassed in the accursed thing and brought wrath upon the whole congregation. In the estimation of the ten tribes, therefore, the building of another altar was a sin, and a very heinous sin, as is evident from the comparisons which they bring forward, and the earnestness with which they seek to dissuade their brethren from it. Then, supposing that their motive may have been an apprehension that the land on the other side Jordan was unclean, and needed to be sanctified by an altar and by sacrifice, they implore them rather to abandon it and come and dwell with them, generously offering them a share of their own possessions in the land of Canaan. Only, they say, "Rebel not against the Lord, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar, beside the altar of the Lord our God."

And what was the answer which the men of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh made to their brethren? They at once admitted that, if they had built an altar for the purpose of offering upon it burnt-offering, meat-offering, or peace-offering, their conduct would have been quite indefensible. But they declare—and they solemnly appeal to God to attest the truth of their words—that they

had never dreamt of committing such a flagrant sin. Their only object was to erect a monument, that might be a witness between them and their brethren on the other side Jordan in future ages, lest the descendants of the ten tribes should say to their children, "What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel?" This is the way in which they vindicate their conduct, to the unspeakable relief and satisfaction of their brethren, repudiating in the strongest and most explicit terms the idea of their building another altar to be used for sacrifice. "God forbid," they say, "that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt-offerings, for meat-offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the Lord our God that is before His tabernacle."

This narrative proves in the clearest and most conclusive way, that in the days of Joshua all Israel were acquainted with this law of a central sanctuary, and all Israel admitted that it was a heinous sin to build any other altar for sacrifice besides the altar of Jehovah which was before His tabernacle. And yet this is the law that is singled out above all others as proving that Deuteronomy, the book in which it is found, must have originated in the days of the later kings of Judah! Attempts have, of course, been made to break down the testimony furnished by the circumstances connected

with the erection of this altar—significantly called “the altar of Ed,” or “witness”—but I do not hesitate to say that these attempts have signally failed. Thus it has been said that this altar was built on the west bank of the Jordan. I am persuaded that it was not, and I give in a footnote my reasons for this persuasion.\* But really it does

\* In verse 11 the altar is said to have been built “over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel.” If this be a correct rendering, it settles the question. The altar was on the east bank, facing the land of Canaan, at the place where the children of Israel originally crossed the Jordan. And this is the uniform rendering of the Hebrew word in our English Bible, where localities are concerned—“over against Mount Gerizim,” “over against Mount Ebal,” “the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon,” &c. (Joshua viii. 33, ix. 1). Gesenius, in his Lexicon, says that the words in question, **בְּאַלְמָנָה**, whether after verbs of rest or motion, signify “*towards* any one.” But even if we take the rendering proposed by those who take a different view of the situation of the altar,—“in front of the land of Canaan”—at the very most this leaves it an open question, whether the altar stood on the edge or forehead of the land to the west of Jordan, or on the eastern bank fronting Canaan. And if so, then we may surely argue that those who built the altar, whether for sacrifice or for witness, would have had the sense to build it on their own territory. If for sacrifice—and this must have been *prima facie* a very likely thing, or the ten tribes would not at once have proceeded on the assumption—then we may be sure they would not have built it on the wrong side of the river Jordan, where it would have been, especially in time of flood, practically inaccessible. If for witness, while they would undoubtedly place it in the view of their brethren in Canaan, a very small amount of prudence would suffice to make them build it on their own ground, where they would be able to preserve it from injury or demolition. The argument

not matter. The whole narrative implies that exception was taken, not to the site of the altar, but to the building of any other altar whatsoever. The same answer must be made to the other arguments, that the altar was too large, and that it was not built in a place where God had recorded His name. Neither were these the grounds of offence given to Israel by the building of this altar. All that is beside the question. Let any man candidly read the chapter, and he will see that it was

drawn from the supposition of their land being unclean, so that an altar could not be erected on it, is entirely fanciful. No doubt, when the people of God were, as a punishment for their sins, dispersed among the nations, they lived in lands which were unclean, and where they were not at liberty to worship God by altar and sacrifice (Hosea ix. 3, Amos vii. 17). But it is not true, as has been confidently alleged, that "the mark of an unclean land is that an altar for the worship of Jehovah cannot be erected in it." If so, there never could have been an altar set up in Canaan, for in Leviticus xviii. 24, 25, we read: "Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these things the nations are defiled which I cast out before you. And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants." See also Ezra ix. 11. It was the abominations of the heathen that had made the land on both sides of the Jordan unclean, and the ten tribes naturally supposed that their brethren wished to sanctify their section, as the territory to the west had already been sanctified by the erection of an altar and the daily offering of sacrifice to Jehovah. The vehemence of the protest against a step so natural, prompted by a motive so good, shows how strong a hold the Deuteronomic law had taken upon that generation, the most faithful to Jehovah that Israel ever saw (Joshua xxiv. 31).

accepted by both parties as a commonplace—a thing which there was no denying—that to build another altar besides that which was before the tabernacle was an offence against Jchovah. The charge brought against them is not that they are going off to the worship of other gods, nor that their altar is too big, nor that they have put it in the wrong place. It is distinctly and specifically this—“Ye rebel against the Lord, *in building you an altar, beside the altar of the Lord your God.*” And in their anxiety to clear themselves from such a charge, the accused party state the nature of the supposed offence with still greater precision, when they admit that they would have been rebelling against the Lord, and turning from following Him, if they had built an altar for burnt-offerings, for meat-offerings, or for sacrifices, “*beside the altar of the Lord our God that is before His tabernacle.*” Therefore both parties must have had Deuteronomy xii. in view, for nowhere else is such an act condemned.

The law of the central sanctuary, then, so far from being an evidence for the late origin of Deuteronomy, is a proof of its antiquity. And yet, if it had not been for the account preserved to us in the Book of Joshua of the altar of Ed, it would have been one of the most formidable difficulties in the way of a belief that Deuteronomy is a record of the words of Moses. May we not

reasonably argue, that if the principal witness brought forward by our opponents has thus been constrained to give evidence in our favour, the testimony of the others would be to the same effect, if only some missing link in Israel's history could be restored ?

The notion, then, that Deuteronomy, and especially the legislation in chapter xii., is of late origin is disproved by the history of the period immediately succeeding that of Moses, as we find it recorded in the Book of Joshua. But now, consider how seriously that view reflects on the credibility, not to say the inspiration, of the book itself. For we read in verse 9, “Ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you.” It is difficult to conceive how these words could have been written seven hundred years after their settlement in Canaan. But let us accept the supposition that this is a mere literary form, that these words were put parabolically into the mouth of Moses. Mark what immediately follows :—“But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God giveth you to inherit, and when He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety ; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there : thither ye shall bring all that I command you.” That is to say, the new law, restricting

them to one central sanctuary, was to come into force as soon as they were quietly settled in the land. Now, if this was written by a prophet who lived some fifty years before the reign of King Josiah, can we acquit him of fraud and falsehood? Must not his words have been intended to lead his readers to believe that the law of a central sanctuary was not one which was then for the first time enacted, but one that had prevailed from the days of Joshua downwards? Accordingly, when this book, alleged to have been written at this late period, and lost during the reign of Manasseh, was found by Hilkiah in the temple, and read in the ears of King Josiah, we are told that he rent his clothes, and sent to inquire of the Lord, “for great,” said he, “is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because *our fathers* have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book.” On the supposition of the late origin of the book, therefore, it contains language which is deceptive in its nature, and therefore unworthy of a divine book—language which did, in point of fact, deceive Josiah into the belief that his fathers had been breaking a law which (on the hypothesis we are now considering) had in their days no existence. It is too much to expect us to believe this, and therefore, although there may be some difficulties outstanding which we cannot solve, as in writings so ancient and a narrative so brief

we may naturally expect, we must fall back on the old belief of the Church in all ages, that Deuteronomy is, what it professes to be, a narrative of the addresses delivered and the laws promulgated to Israel by Moses on the plains of Moab. I believe that this is so obviously the only true conclusion that it will command the assent of all believing men, when the novelty of the views that have recently startled the Church and the country has worn off. And thus the word of God will come forth, as it has ever done, from the crucible of the closest investigation, “as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times.”

I feel that my subject this day has not been very practical in its nature—not so practical as I would desire every lecture and sermon to be. But it will not be without its practical use, if it be the means of confirming any in the belief of the historic verity of the Book of Deuteronomy as a narrative of the closing words of the great law-giver of Israel.

To the young let me, according to my usual practice, say a concluding word. You know, I daresay, that considerable anxiety has been caused by the views that have lately been put forth about this Book of Deuteronomy. Many good people have been much pained by what seemed to them a want of reverence for the word of God, fitted to do harm, especially to the young. Others, there is

reason to fear, have had their faith in one book of Scripture shaken ; and when men begin to doubt the truth of a part of the Bible, they may begin by and by to doubt the rest. But we know that God can bring good even out of evil. And good will come out of the doubts that have been thrown upon the question, whether the words of Deuteronomy are to be taken in their natural sense or not, if it only leads us all to search our Bibles better than we have ever done before. If we do, I am sure that many of the difficulties that perplex us will be cleared away, and as for the rest, they will retire into the background, and look very small indeed in comparison with the majesty and the beauty, the authority and the gentleness, the purity and the love, that shine forth on every page of Holy Scripture, and prove it to be divine. But then, if we are to see all this, we must not content ourselves with a mere hasty reading of our daily portion. We must study our Bibles carefully, with reverence and humility, and with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Ghost. It is recorded, to the credit of the Bereans, that they were " more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so." And what was the result ? " Therefore many of them believed." Let us imitate their example, and we, too, shall be enabled to believe, or estab-

lished in the faith. “Search the scriptures,” said our Lord Himself; “for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me.”









*Gaylord*

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